

CONFIDENTIAL

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Subject: Meeting on Thailand -- July 1, 1969

Participants: Kenneth T. Young, The Asia Society,
New York
Lauriston Sharp, Cornell University,
New York
[redacted] CIA, OCI Thai Analyst
Henry A. Kissinger
John H. Holdridge
William A. K. Lake

25X1

DOS Review Completed

1. Regions and Minorities

Sharp noted that one of the government's main problems is to unite the country's four regions without suppressing them. He described the Northeast as containing the "country Thais." The language there is much like that of across the river in Laos, but the populace identifies politically with Bangkok.

Young noted the dangers of over-reaction by the Thai Government to the insurgency in the Northeast. He feared that a heavy-handed military reaction would alienate the people from the government (as happened in the north last year). The participants agreed that while the insurgency fed on internal problems, it would collapse without external support. [redacted] when the Thai military moved into northeastern villages in 1967, the local apparats collapsed.

25X1

There was general agreement that the insurgency in the Northeast is under fairly good control; the insurgency in the north, however, is having more success.

The various minorities in Thailand were listed as:

- 500,000 Cambodians along the border;
- several million Malays on the southern border;
- a quarter of a million hill tribesmen;
- 3 million Chinese, who are concentrated primarily in the southern cities.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

-2-

The Chinese are well assimilated, at least by South-east Asian standards. There is not too much tension, although some government officials were reportedly concerned about a spill-over to Thailand of the communal fighting in Malaysia.

There are many Chinese in the Communist Party hierarchy.

Sharp emphasized the need for the Thai Government to adopt an effective minorities policy, particularly with regard to the hill tribes. The government should train people to deal with the minorities. As an example of the unenlightened actions of the government towards the minorities, Sharp said that Cambodian children are required to speak Thai in the early grades of school instead of being allowed to learn the language there. As a result, many drop out.

2. Central Society

Thai society centers on Bangkok. The farther you are from that city, the farther you are from authority. There has traditionally been no concept of the territorial state. Thailand had zonal borders--it extended as far as the authority and ability to raise taxes of Bangkok extended.

3. Prestige

The two prestige jobs are government service and the monkhood. Government service--which includes most teachers--has high status because of the power it provides and, more importantly, because a government servant is in the King's hierarchy. In fact, it is seen as service to the King rather than to the State.

4. Personalities

The King: Young said that the King is hard to judge at first meeting. He tends to 10-20 minute monologues. He speaks perfect English. He sometimes sounds surprisingly cynical, an attitude caused by doubts about his own political role. Until the late 1950's, when he had worked out a

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

-3-

mutually advantageous collaboration with Sarit, the King had lacked confidence and had often feared for his life.

The King is very important to the people of Thailand --young as well as old. He is held in an almost magical awe.

Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn: Thanom is primus inter pares, a figure of conciliation.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Thanat Khoman: Thanat is very powerful in foreign policy, but doesn't cut much ice outside it. He may be on the way out, as he has applied for a seat on the ICJ. Thanat has discussed the possibility of an opening to China during the past year on various occasions--both in cabinet meetings and publicly. He is not, however, anti-American.

5. Effect of Vietnam Outcomes on Thailand

There was some inconclusive argument over whether the Thais would seek an accommodation with China should Vietnam be united under the Communists. There was agreement, however, that key factors would be North Vietnamese actions in Laos and Northeast Thailand, Chinese actions, and--a matter of great concern to the Thais--the kind and level of U.S. support. Holdridge observed that this is perhaps the key factor to the Thais in the Vietnam situation--they are more concerned with how we perform than what the actual result is.

Only 22 to 25 percent of the budget is spent on all security activities. Great amounts are spent on education.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

-4-

6. President's Visit

The group agreed that what the Thais want most from the visit is another reaffirmation of the U.S. commitment to Thailand. They need constant reassurance. The importance the Thai placed on Secretary Rogers' reaffirmation of the Rusk-Thanat communique was noted.

Young suggested that the Thais will also be interested in the question of "retooling" the U.S. presence. Thanat is particularly interested in this. They want a U.S. commitment and U.S. help without a large, visible U.S. presence. It was agreed, however, that it would alarm the Thais if we raised the subject of reducing the U.S. presence there. Young suggested that we approach the subject through questions, asking the Prime Minister about the impact of U.S. troops in Thailand and what we should do about it. [redacted] doubted that we should raise it even in question form; we should let them bring it up.

25X1

[redacted] the Thais will also wish to discuss the situation in Laos. They want the U.S. to commit itself to fight in Laos to hold the Mekong Valley. They will also, he said, press for more military and economic assistance.

25X1

There was agreement that the Thais would wish to discuss Vietnam and will hope that we say that we will stick it out. The Thais support Vietnamization and react badly to the word "coalition," partially because of their dislike of the Laos experience.

The group agreed with Kissinger's suggestion that the Thais would be interested in discussing the future of the region. Young reported that the Thais he had met recently had often raised the President's Foreign Affairs article on the subject.

CONFIDENTIAL